



FAMILY RESOURCE CENTERS: Best Practice Model

This document describes a Family Resource Center (FRC) model for best practice which is in development in the state of Wisconsin. The purpose of this writing is to document the role, foundational principles, and structure of FRCs, according to the current understanding, with acknowledgement that this model will continue to evolve over time.

INTRODUCTION

FRCs serve as community hubs for family support by promoting child, family and community strengths; building parenting skills; and providing access to community supports. Research has shown that children are more likely to thrive when they live in safe, stable, nurturing environments and in families that have the support and opportunities they need to thrive. FRCs seek

to offer programs, services, and supports to families which promote child well-being and reduce risk factors for child maltreatment.

FRCs are an integral partner in comprehensive, community-based family support systems and are centered on children and parents (anyone with primary caregiving responsibility). FRC services are available universally to the entire population within the targeted geographic area, and place emphasis on reaching all families, regardless of level of risk. Their emphasis is on primary prevention, which addresses the root causes of adversity and underlying factors to avert child maltreatment prior to occurrence and builds protective factors which buffer against adversity and promote positive growth of children.

FRCs provide natural family supports, link families to complimentary community-based services, and serve as a referral source for more intensive or targeted services. FRCs offer programs and services that have been shown to reduce risk factors for negative outcomes for children and actively promote positive child outcomes, including services that are universally available as well as some that are targeted to families experiencing specific risk factors.

Figure 1. Elements of Family Support Definition



FAMILY SUPPORT PERSPECTIVE

FRCs are characterized by their shared family support perspective. According to the National Family Support Network, Family Support America defined the concept of Family Support as:

- ▶ A set of beliefs and an approach to strengthening and empowering families and communities to support the needs and development of the entire family system, including children, youth, and adult family members.
- ▶ A shift in human services delivery that encourages public and private agencies to work together and to become more preventive, responsive, flexible, family-focused, strength-based, and holistic, and thus more effective.
- ▶ A type of community-based program designed to prevent family problems by strengthening parent-child relationships and providing what parents need in order to be good nurturers and providers.
- ▶ A movement for change in social norms that holds all community members - policymakers, program providers, parents, employers- responsible for improving the lives of children and families. The family support movement strives to transform our society into caring communities that put children and families first and that ensure that all children and families get what they need to succeed.

UNIFYING PRINCIPLES

FRCs exist in many settings, vary in configuration, and provide many different services. While they are as unique as the families and communities they serve, they share unified principles that define their approach to families, community, staff, and service provision.

THE 9 PRINCIPLES OF FAMILY SUPPORT

The Standards of Quality for Family Strengthening and Support (National Standards) are designed to be used by stakeholders as a tool for planning, providing, and assessing quality practice with the intent to ensure that families are supported and strengthened through this quality practice. These Nine Principles of family Support, which were originally developed by Family Support America*, have been incorporated into the National Standards:

- 1 Staff and families work together in relationships based on equality and respect.
- 2 Staff enhance families' capacity to support the growth and development of all family members-adults, youth, and children.
- 3 Families are viewed as resources to their own members, to other families, to programs, and to communities.
- 4 FRCs seek to affirm and strengthen families' cultural, racial, and linguistic identities and support their ability to thrive in a multicultural society.
- 5 FRCs are embedded in their communities and contribute to the community-building process.
- 6 FRCs advocate with families for services and systems that are fair, responsive, and accountable to the families they serve.
- 7 FRCs work with families to mobilize formal and informal resources to support family development.
- 8 FRCs are flexible and continually responsive to merging family and community issues.
- 9 Principles of family support are modeled in all program activities, including planning, governance, and administration.

*Adopted from Family Support America, 1997-2002, 20 N. Wacker Drive, Suite 1100, Chicago, IL 60606



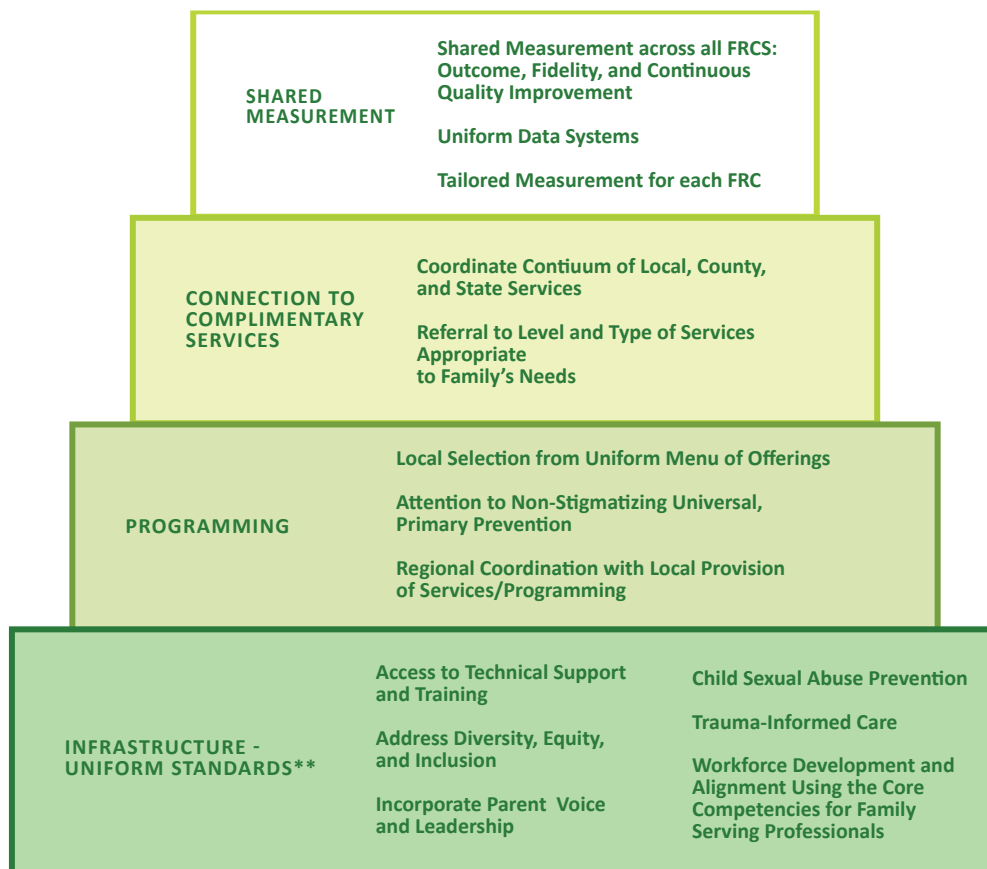
WISCONSIN FAMILY SUPPORT PRINCIPLES

In addition to the National Standards, Wisconsin has developed principles that align FRCs within the state:

- ▶ FRCs have a strengths-based orientation and take a strengths-based approach to families, services, staff, and community.
- ▶ FRCs provide universal services in a non-stigmatizing way to all families within a target geographic area
- ▶ The central focus and orientation of FRCs is primary prevention with links to secondary and tertiary services and service providers, based on family need.
- ▶ FRCs seek to prevent child maltreatment and promote the optimal development of children. They strive to help families build upon the five Protective Factors.
- ▶ Programs and services are community-based, selected, and tailored according to local needs, and designed to prevent family challenges by strengthening parent-child relationships and supporting parents to be nurturing caregivers and providers.

- ▶ FRCs utilize resources that have the highest level of available evidence of effectiveness for families, including evidence-based and evidence-informed programming and approaches.
- ▶ FRC services are voluntary and at the discretion of the caregiver(s).
- ▶ FRCs foster parent leadership and incorporate parent voice.
- ▶ FRCs attend to the unique contributions and roles of mothers and fathers and other caregivers, as well as the variety of configurations of functional family units.
- ▶ FRCs are conscious of the need to attend to diversity, equity, and inclusion within all aspects of their internal dynamics, their relationships with and services for families, and their interaction with the community.

Figure 2. Family Resource Center Infrastructure Model



UNIFORM STANDARDS

While FRCs provide access to a comprehensive and multi-disciplinary range of voluntary parent education and support services, the specific services offered at each community-based agency are determined by local community needs and vary from one agency to another. However, unifying standards

ensure that families accessing supports are receiving high quality services.

A common FRC infrastructure helps ensure that families who utilize FRCs will be able to expect the same approach to and quality of services throughout Wisconsin, though

the individual offerings will be unique to the area in which each FRC is embedded. It strengthens the ability to develop new FRCs in underserved areas by providing a framework and process from which to begin the work, tap into mentoring support, and build effectiveness from the onset. It enhances the ability of FRCs to collaborate and learn from one another, supports workforce development, and provides the ability to create an evaluation process across FRCs that can demonstrate the benefits to families, communities, and businesses of the FRC network as a system.

The development of a strong FRC network provides the opportunity to promote awareness of FRCs throughout the state, including their defining characteristics, how they differ from other entities, their benefits, and their locations. Building a strong network, demonstrating uniform standards, creating a continuous quality improvement process, and showing strong evaluation results provides FRCs with more leverage to seek policy that supports their efforts and dedicated base funding.

STANDARDS OF QUALITY FOR FAMILY STRENGTHENING AND SUPPORT

The National Family Support Network's Standards of Quality for Family Strengthening and Support are designed to be used by Family Support programs as a tool for planning, providing, and assessing quality practice. They create uniform language and expectations in the Family Support and Strengthening field across different kinds of programs and services. These standards are also fully aligned with the Strengthen Families™ Protective Factors Framework. These standards ensure that programs within agencies focus on family centeredness;

family strengthening; diversity, equity, and inclusion; community strengthening; and evaluation when providing services.

To apply these standards, FRC staff must be trained to assess and implement them. A training team from Supporting Families Together Association and the Wisconsin Child Abuse and Neglect Prevention Board are certified to offer this training to FRCs in Wisconsin.

INTEGRATION OF THE PROTECTIVE FACTORS FRAMEWORK

All families face challenges. It is extremely difficult to predict whether or how threats to child and family well-being will occur within a specific family, even when associated risk factors are present. Research has demonstrated that building protective factors broadly and supporting positive childhood experiences and relationships is more effective than trying to identify them just prior to onset or addressing them after the fact. Therefore, prevention approaches that strengthen Protective Factors broadly are most likely to be effective in reducing maltreatment. The Strengthening Families™ Protective Factors Framework is an evidence-informed, strengths-based approach to child maltreatment prevention and family well-being promotion developed by the Center for the Study of Social Policy (CSSP). It identifies five key Protective Factors that increase family strength, promote optimal child development, and reduce the likelihood of child abuse and neglect.

The Strengthening Families™ Protective Factors Framework is foundational to the work of FRCs. The Five Protective Factors strengthen the roots of family well being and provide a common language to talk about family strength. Understanding their own

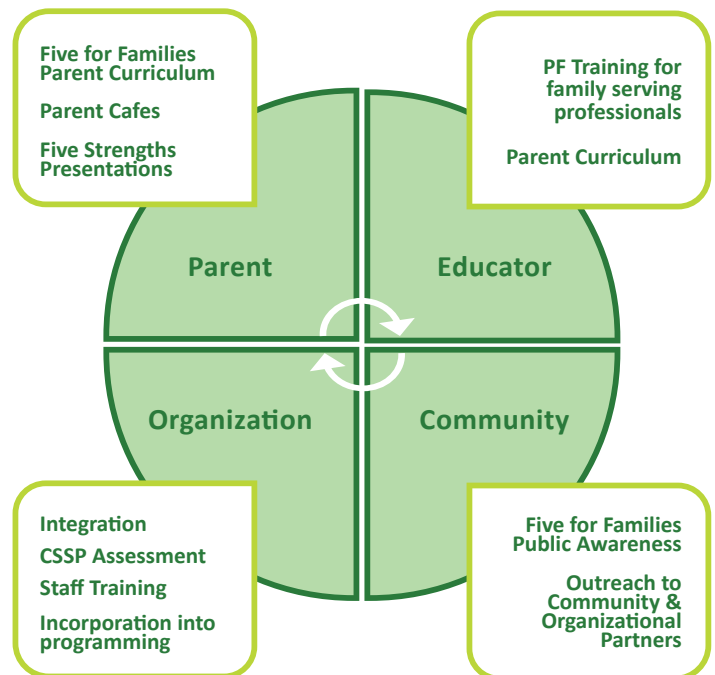
Protective Factors also helps FRC employees to remain a healthy workforce. In order to be most effective the five Protective Factors need to be integrated into all aspects of the work of the FRC. Effective FRCs do the following:

- ▶ Use of the Center for the Study of Social Policy’s Strengthening Families Community Based Program Self Assessment at regular intervals and development of plans for implementing the findings. The findings and implementation goals must be reported to the Prevention Board using the Wisconsin Prevention Reporting System.
- ▶ Participation of all staff in the Bringing the Protective Factors Framework to Life in Your Work professional development training.
- ▶ Allocation of an FRC staff person to serve as the Protective Factors Coordinator and oversee protective factors activities and implementation for the FRC and community within the organizations service region.
- ▶ Teaching parents about Protective Factors and helping them to identify and build upon their own family protective factors using the Five for Families parent curriculum, Parent Cafes, shared leadership opportunities, and clarifying the intersections with other program offerings.
- ▶ Promotion of public awareness of the Protective Factors within the community, with parents who are not involved in the FRC and among other family serving organizations and staff using the Five for Families campaign materials and website.

WISCONSIN PROTECTIVE FACTORS INITIATIVE

A local coordinator, who is responsible for overseeing protective factors integration within the FRC service region, will be embedded within each FRC.

Figure 3. Protective Factors Coordinator Responsibilities



CORE COMPETENCIES FOR FAMILY SERVING PROFESSIONALS

The Wisconsin Core Competencies for Family Serving Professionals serve as a foundation to foster family serving professionals’ expertise and guide professional development. These core competencies can support agencies in fostering workforce development and alignment with professional development offerings for onboarding and ongoing professional development so that employees have uniform standards across FRCs. The core competencies serve as a resource to:

- ▶ Establish state level recommendations for expectations for trainings and knowledge at increments of employment time
- ▶ Guide hiring, performance evaluation, and professional development of employees within FRCs

- ▶ Increase FRC network capacity to provide training and technical assistance
- ▶ Expand professional development opportunities available to FRCs in accordance with their needs

PARENT VOICE AND LEADERSHIP

Parents and caregivers are the guardians of their own family strengths and needs. According to the Standards of Quality for Family Strengthening and Support, parents/caregivers are significant resources for their own family members and others. Families should be involved in the planning, development, and implementation of FRC programming and services. Services, activities, and approaches should be developed in response to the interest and needs of families. FRCs need to dedicate effort, time, resources, and planning to support parent leadership and incorporate family voice including the following:

- ▶ Allocating a portion of one or more staff member's FTE to developing and sustaining parent leadership and voice within the organization and to helping other staff members to integrate parent partnership and voice into their own interactions with parents
- ▶ Including parent collaboration and leadership development into the work responsibilities of all staff who interact directly with parents
- ▶ Requiring staff participation in training to develop and sustain a structured, parent-led advisory process or group, as well as other opportunities for parent leadership and engagement
- ▶ Developing and implementing an outreach, recruitment, and retention plan for parents and caregivers



- ▶ Allocating time, money and effort to ensuring equitable representation and an inclusive environment for diverse or underrepresented parents and families.
- ▶ Establishing a process for parent and participant involvement in leadership and policy
- ▶ Participating in State Parent Leadership Community of Practice and utilization of technical support

MENU OF PROGRAMMING

Families benefit from a diverse menu of programming and services that address different types and levels of needs. This level of variety can be challenging to implement and deliver. One effective approach consists of a regional FRC structure with localized service provision offering connection and referral to complimentary community services where families can be matched with the intensity of services tailored to their level of need. As a practical matter, options for programs and services are frequently dictated by available funding and the expectation of funders. However, even with these constraints there is often

opportunity to choose from a menu of programs. In determining selection criteria, it is useful to consider a balance of the following program characteristics.

Selection Criteria

- ▶ Level of Evidence of Quality
- ▶ Targeted Audience
- ▶ Needs of the Parent Population
- ▶ Format
- ▶ Community Needs
- ▶ Dosage
- ▶ Targeted Outcomes
- ▶ Partnering Systems or Sites
- ▶ Ethnic and/or cultural adaptation or relevance for intended audience

Since an important purpose of FRCs is to prevent child maltreatment, it is important to incorporate approaches that increase knowledge and resources for parents which mitigate known risk factors for child maltreatment. The Prevention Board has created a Family Strengthening Continuum comprised of four categories of primary prevention programming which address specific types of risk factors for child abuse and neglect. The Family Strengthen

Continuum consists of:

- ▶ Evidence-based parent education (e.g., Triple P Positive Parenting Program or Nurturing Parenting)
- ▶ Abusive head trauma prevention (e.g., Period of Purple Crying)
- ▶ Universal newborn home visits and/or connection to primary care parent programming (e.g., Family Connects, DULCE, SEEK)
- ▶ Child sexual abuse prevention (e.g., Stewards of Children – parents and community members, Awareness to Action – policies)

FRCs should seek to offer services or collaborate with other partners to ensure that options from all four categories of the Family Strengthening Continuum are available to parents in their service area. These should be aligned with other quality program offerings that also strengthen protective factors, support healthy child development, and foster constructive parent-child interaction such as:

- ▶ Evidence-based and grassroots home visiting supports (some Welcome Baby programs)
- ▶ Parenting helplines
- ▶ Evidence-informed parent education classes and workshops
- ▶ Opportunities to build social connections and support (such as playgroups, support groups, Parent Cafes, family events, leadership opportunities, open gym)
- ▶ Culturally and ethnically relevant activities, approaches and adaptations to interactions with families, including programs and services
- ▶ Concrete supports (such as toy lending



libraries, employment services, housing support, diaper banks, resource rooms, micro-cash assistance)

- ▶ Family consultation to identify interests, learning needs, service needs
- ▶ Drop-in time
- ▶ Safety and health (such as car seat safety, gun safety, technology, safe sleep, food/diet, play, substance abuse treatment or referral)
- ▶ Childcare selection or support
- ▶ Literacy support
- ▶ Financial literacy education programming within FRCs and connection to targeted resources
- ▶ Family navigation connecting to community resources

SHARED MEASUREMENT

Overarching statewide outcomes, shared objectives and measures, and unified reporting structures are being developed to demonstrate overall effectiveness of FRCs across the state, in addition to data collection on program effectiveness and other unique internal metrics. To ensure uniform reporting standards and reduce the burden on individual FRCs, evaluation of the state FRC network will be coordinated at the state level. In Wisconsin, FRC network data will be captured and archived in the Wisconsin Prevention Reporting System and other tools.

COMMUNITY COLLABORATION

The level and diversity of efforts necessary to fully support the needs of families require the support of an entire community. FRCs need to articulate a Comprehensive Community Collaboration Plan to build a continuum of local and regional services,

ensure community buy-in, and address social norms that support families.

Examples of potential sources of partnership:

Libraries	Clubs
Faith Communities	Mental Health
Schools	Childcare
Law Enforcement	Judicial
Healthcare/Hospitals	Local Businesses
Sports Teams	Policymakers
Service Organizations	Community Centers
Human/Social Services	
Local Decision Makers & Leaders	
Parks & Recreation Departments	

CONCLUSION

Supporting the varied needs of Wisconsin families is both a rewarding and challenging endeavor. Family Resource Centers are uniquely positioned to meet those needs. Establishing statewide standards for best practice helps to ensure that families from one part of the state receive the same level of quality and approach to services as another. Additionally, FRCs benefit and are strengthened by statewide structure, by network opportunities for collaboration and shared learning, and by state level resources and technical support. FRCs are dedicated to reaching out to families in the most effective ways. Statewide standards and support for best practices can help to extend that reach.

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